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THE
GUARDING OF A GODDESS



JOHN D. WARE

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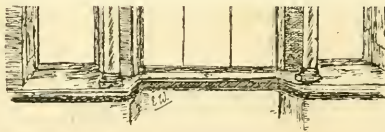


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THE GUARDING OF A GODDESS
AND OTHER POEMS

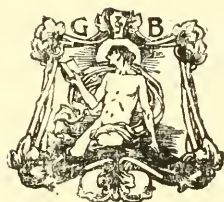
THE GUARDING OF A GODDESS

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

JOHN D. WARE

AUTHOR OF 'THE GREY HORSEMAN' AND OTHER POEMS



GAY AND BIRD

22 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND
LONDON

1905

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TO

A CHUM OF MINE

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THE GUARDING OF A GODDESS

DEDICATED TO MY MOTHER AND SISTERS

How oft, when I have watched a lovely flower
Spring from the sweet earth upward to the sun,
I've grieved to know that it so soon must wither,
When for a brief space, in triumphant glory,
It has enriched the world with the bright gaze
Of its fair eyes. Oh ! it is sad to know
The lovely only comes to go again.
'Tis sad to know—I shrink from breathing it,
But I will face the truth : face it with me—
That those fair things I love so much to watch,
That those bewitching things at last must go—
Must one by one be reft from thee. The beauty
Of thy fair body must leave thee like a dream.
They all must go, those things I love so much—
That lissom form, free as the mountain roe ;
Those eyes, where some shy wild thing seems to lurk
In their deep shade, no sooner seen than lost,
But once seen ne'er forgotten ; those sweet lips,
Which, curving upwards in a mischievous smile,
Must melt man's heart to tears unless it be
Hard as a stone. Oh, I could watch all day
The ripples as they play about thy mouth,

The Guarding of a Goddess

As ripples circling round the sunlit rocks
In summer seas, but infinitely more
Entrancing, in their mystic sympathy
With the shifting lights and shadows in those deep orbs,
And with the shy spirit that peeps from them.
And oft a fury rises in my heart,
I'd throw my arms about thee, clasp thee to me,
And, kissing thy sweet lips, and brow, and hair,
In sheer revenge for the tumult thou hast wrought
Within me by thine innocent, artless wiles,
Would call and keep thy beauty mine for ever,—
But that my very love for thee restrains me.

'Tis sad to see a flow'r droop and wither ;
But I know what is sadder, sadder far :
It is to see a flow'r in a smoky city
Blighted and choked by soot and filth ; it is
To see a sparkling rivulet, pure and sweet
From the parent hills, gradually lose its freshness—
Not only its merry-hearted ways—its freshness,
Its purity, till when at last it flows
Back to the sea's heart, 'tis not only dull,
And slow, and sullen, but thick and turbid, too,
Full of the mud and filth of the great world.
Oh, this is terrible ; and to stand by
And see the slow change, powerless to prevent it,
In this there is an agony worse to bear
Than aught I know. We feel so impotent.

Yes, it is sad to see the lovely die,
And yet, perchance, could we know all, not very ;
God dies not, and the lovely does not perish :
Its passing is but part of the eternal
Ebb and flow of the tide in the mighty sea ;

The Guarding of a Goddess

It was not meant that it should stay for ever.
Its work done in a thousand hearts and souls,
It joyously turns homeward to its Father.

Grieve not for this, then—no, we will not grieve
For this. But of the other?—I do know
There's naught can mitigate the woe of that,
Unless we trust there is a Power above us
Whose love and patience are invincible,
And that He can do all things, though we cannot.
Oh, it must be so! Sweet spirit, thou'rt in danger.
Believe with me thy Father has a heart
Unbounded, inexhaustible, and then
Thank Him that He who made thee will not have
His creature lost—His honour is at stake;
That, shouldst thou sink to the bottom of the sea,
He, having stood aside that we might help thee,
And finding us fail, or in will or power,
Deterred by naught, would plunge down after thee
And bring thee up, swooning indeed, perhaps,
But living yet!

But, oh! the ingratitude
That thus would tempt Him after all He's done,
All He is doing every day for thee.
There He sits, throned on high, calmly and grandly,
Working to rid this poor old weary world
Of its weight of misery, and to bring peace
And joy to every heart. For thee alone,
Or me, if there were no one else to save,
He would work on thus for a million years
Untiring: shall we help or hinder Him
In His great task? for He has honoured us
With the privilege, if we care for it, to work

The Guarding of a Goddess

With Him, for Him. Oh, under such a Chief,
So noble, so majestic, yet so simple,
So self-denying, even in His good work
(For He could do all, if He chose, Himself,
Without our aid, only He longs for us
To be partakers in His Divine rapture
Of service, to know this incomparable
Delight)—oh, to work under such a Chief
Is bliss indeed ; to fight and struggle on,
Sturdily breasting breakers mountains high,
Ever to rise above them, flushed with triumph,
Still knowing that the end for which we fight
Is worth the battle—this is the great thing :
When I am sure of this I can fight on
With a rare zest, unknown at other times.
'Tis when a doubt creeps o'er me, serpentlike,
That I but fight for shadows, after all,
That I grow listless, as the subtle poison
Spreads through my system, till my nerveless hand
Drops to my side: I cannot strike a blow.

But who could doubt, with such a Chief as this ?
And, tell me, what alternative is there
To working with Him ? Shall we play alone,
Or work at some task we have set ourselves,
All by ourselves, or with a few companions,
Hid in a corner, heedless of all else,
And equally unheeded ? To what end ?
Is it worth while ? Most of us dwell in corners,
And but few heed us, and our little deeds
Are done and pass unnoticed, and no trace
Is left of good or ill. Oh, to what end ?
Whose word save ours alone have we to prove

The Guarding of a Goddess

It is worth while ? A babe deems many things
Worth while at which we laugh, knowing them vain.
I could not put my heart in these vain deeds,
(Though it may be, if pleasures did not cloy,
They would suffice ; why, then, 'tis well they cloy).
But for these trivial tasks—to me 'tis frightful
To work alone, unheeded, never sure
The end for which we toil is worth the gaining.

But come, for I will show thee what I've found.
Take my hand, softly tread, hold thy sweet breath,
And now gaze with me on this glorious picture
Which fires my heart, which must be more than dream,
Which must be, or my very soul will die.
Oh, could I make thee see it as I've seen it !
But my heart fails me, and I pause aghast
Before the splendour and my own presumption.
I feel as one who in his wanderings
Through the wild woods, has come all unawares
On some strange creatures of a marvellous beauty
At play there. Though he fain would take them home
And show what he has found, he dares not move,
Gazing on them, and trembling still for fear,
Lest in his haste and clumsiness a twig
Should snap, and the startled creatures break away
Among the brushwood, vanished as a dream
When a shock rudely wakes the sleeper. But
Now I must brace myself, and make the attempt.

I see One—our great Leader—thronèd high
Upon the sun, one blaze of majesty,
('Tis not from aught assumed from without
Of His own will, to dazzle and amaze,
As earthly kinglets do, but bursting forth,

The Guarding of a Goddess

All unrestrainable, from His regal heart,
Since Love is of necessity majestic).
He, on the sun, rides on, our King, in triumph;
We, on the infinite stars, around Him whirl,
Still flying onward towards our unknown goal,
Full confident of reaching it at last,
And that, when reached, 'twill satisfy us all.
So on and on, o'er the vast blue ethery waves,
We ride, oft buffeted by fearful gales,
Oft almost lost in the darkness, yet emerging
Again in triumph as the clouds roll past,
To see our King above us, calm and still,
Unshaken, only troubled at our fears,
Sad that our trust in Him is still so small,
Our courage so imperfect. On we go,
Peering ahead into the dim blue distance
To catch the first glimpse of the land; oft crying
Across the waves to a comrade flashing past,
'How goes it?' 'All's well. And with you?' 'All's
well.'
The shouts grow faint as each flies on his way,
And the space rapidly widens out between.
At length silence ensues: our friend is gone;
All we can see now is a golden ball
Fast narrowing to a mere point of light,
Dwindling away as if dissolved in blue;
And we know many a weary day must pass
Ere he is seen again. Still on we whirl;
New comrades come, to leave us like the last,
We meet, we part, but hope buoys up our hearts,
For we can see our Sun—He shines on all—
On them, on us; and, though we're rived asunder,

The Guarding of a Goddess

This seems a link between us. A wild joy
Lies in the thought, too, of the thousand worlds
Scattered abroad over the infinite sea,
Like ours, each with a heart, a brain, a self,
Guiding, controlling, straining towards one end,
Under one Head, who cares for all alike.

And then—and then—when the goal at last is
reached !

Now for the first time may we quit our posts ;
We fly to throw ourselves at our Captain's feet,
And pour into His comprehending ear
The tale of our adventures and our battles,
Our victories and our sad defeats. And He,
From His great heart, consoles or praises us,
Rebukes us if we're too self-satisfied,
Or finds excuses for us which ourselves
Had never dared to plead. And how we shout !
How rend the air with shouts at His great name !
The cry, caught up around, for miles on miles,
Through the illimitable space of heaven
Rings and re-echoes from ten thousand throats,
All on a sudden filled with ecstasy,
Compelled to shout, whether they will or no,
Carried beyond themselves by the glorious vision
Of His vast Love and Truth and marvellous Beauty !

And there, at His feet, under His rare smile,
We meet our dear old comrades once again.
Oh, the wringing of hands, the tears and laughter,
The tales we have to tell to one another !
'What have you seen? what have you done, old
friend,
Since last we met?' Though our ways wide diverged

The Guarding of a Goddess

Joining at times, only to part again,
Yet all have brought us to one goal at last.
And now how close are we to one another !
All in one land, with nothing to divide,
As in our voyage, each in his small world,
Each with his own work, his own course to steer,
We were perforce divided, even when
We seemed the closest. Now, how different !
How we revel in that close companionship !
Even as prisoners, each in separate cell,
View through the bars their comrades in distress,
Allowed at times to hold converse together
(A boon the sweeter for its rarity),
And thrusting eager fingers through the wires,
Clasp hands for company and to cheat themselves
Into belief they are not quite alone,—
So have we been ; so now are we like them
Suddenly let out into the light and air,
After long years of close captivity
And solitude. No envious bolts and bars
Divide them now ; gladly they run together,
Laughing and crying for the joy of it,
And press each other close against their bosoms !
So after our lone voyaging we exult
In blissful fellowship never held in dream.
While all around lies that mysterious land,
Wide, unexplored, full of a thousand things
Half glimpsed, perchance, in many an old, old dream,
Long gone, but far beyond our wildest hopes,
Of a strange power to fill our hearts with joy,
And keep them full throughout eternity ;
And there behind stretches the mighty sea,

The Guarding of a Goddess

Blue, vast, and fathomless—so thin and clear
That with awed hearts, if we lean o'er the brink,
We can gaze down, down, down, until it seems
Our souls must burst with the immensity.

This, my sweet friend, this, then, is what I've found,
Only it was far grander when I first
Did light on it. That which I feared has chanced :
I've marred its fleeting splendour, bringing it
To thee. Hast ever sought to tell a dream,
Which was magnificent, but which, when told,
Seems but the crudest fairy-tale at best,
Perhaps mere vapourings? Still the form is there,
But all that made it beautiful is gone—
Fled like the colours of a gaudy fly,
So radiant in the sunshine, but, when pinned,
Sombre and brown. There are things all about us
Too fine to be ensnared in our coarse nets,
Dazzling in beauty, but ephemeral,
Impalpable as rainbow-vested mists.
I fear me this is one of them, but still
I trust a few of the bright tints yet remain.

How different it all seems when we think
That God is over all ! No one is lost—
Not even the strange blind things that spend their days
Burrowing in ocean's floor—if God observes.
But oh, what fearful chaos 'tis without Him !
New life bursts forth on every side of us ;
Countless young creatures come to us from the deep ;
As many more are swallowed up by it ;
And we at work in the corner all unseen !
A swarm of puny pigmies lost in the heart

The Guarding of a Goddess

Of a huge jungle in Infinity.

But it is rare to picture to oneself

That, though we seem lost, each moves towards the
light,

Our gradually converging paths at length

Will meet somewhere outside in the broad day,

Where we shall know all and feel safe. The jungle

Is very dense at times, and strange things move

In the deep shade ; but 'tis a rare adventure,

The myriad dangers lending zest to it,

If we but know the end of all is Love,

And we shall win clear through.

Nor is this all ;

Not only does He care for us, our Chief,

And help us in our struggles, but Himself,

Like the great Chief He is, a glorious Hero

(If, as it seems, an ancient book says true),

Though in our pride and blindness we ourselves

Let in the cruel foe and flung the gates

Wide open, welcomed them like honoured guests—

When they fell on us, smote us hip and thigh,

He left His lofty heights secure, stepped down

Into our midst, His royal panoply

Invincible all laid aside, and bringing

His calm strength and indomitable will,

And courage, and unwearying love alone,

Hewed right and left among our enemies,

Armed like the rest of us, and led us on—

All who would follow Him—to victory.

He could have crushed the enemy at one blow

Had He so willed, but no ! too great for this,

Thoughtful for us as ever, he resolved

The Guarding of a Goddess

That we, through whose unfaithfulness and folly
All the great woe had come, should have at least
The chance of undoing, ourselves, the ill we'd wrought,
And show we were no longer fools and babes,
But grown men, brave and wise.

This is our Chief,

But grander still—oh, why will we not love Him ?
Who could imagine one more lovable ?
And each of us, in his degree, might be,
Like Him, gentle and strong, a man indeed,
Swift to o'erthrow the oppressor, swift to help
The wronged, generous and very pitiful
Unto the weak. Oh, would that it were so !
I should not then have cause to fear for thee,
Sweet spirit, as now I fear, knowing too well
How far we still are from this great ideal.
Though it is long now since our Chief came down
To fight for us, to teach us how to fight,
And whom, though years roll on more swiftly ever,
Age follows age, yet we are children still,
We've scarcely mastered yet our alphabet,
And when shall we be strong enough to fight,
And when—ah, when?—shall we have wit to know
How to distinguish friends from enemies ?
For now, instead of concentrating forces,
Rallying round one standard, as one man,
Shoulder to shoulder, back to back, resolved
To stand or fall together, as brothers should,
What do we see ? A fainting land, all racked
With civil strife, brother at war with brother,
Each man contending for his own mean end,
No discipline and no authority ;

The Guarding of a Goddess

Meantime the grinning foes, all-conquering,
Steal through our camp, pass in and out unchallenged,
And while some cunningly are set to work
Still to foment the discord, their companions,
Laughing like fiends at this tremendous jest,
Prowl round us and despoil our goods ; and last,
When there's no more to rob, swiftly they fall
Upon our rear, and throw into wild rout
Our forces hopelessly disorganized.

Alas ! and when we fall, not we alone
Too oft, but others are dragged down with us.
Oh, my sweet friend, I have good cause to fear
For thee, knowing what we men are ; not noble—
We cannot claim to be noble like our Chief.
So we come out unscathed, what matters it,
We ask, about the rest ? If strong enough,
They too will rise ; if not, are we to blame ?
We did not make them weak—'tis their affair ;
They should have ta'en more heed. Each for himself.
If two fall, shall the stronger lie in the mud
For aye because his comrade cannot rise ?
This surely were not reason. So it is
That if two fall, as wild birds beaten down
By storm and tempest, sadly battered about,
After a time one rises from the mud,
Shakes himself, spreads his wings, and soars away,
Proud to find that he is not much the worse—
A ruffled plume or two, but what of that ?
'Tis soon set right. The other—what of her ?
Ah, look ! She lies there on the ground, quite still.
Is life extinct ? No ; now she tries to rise
And fly away, too ; but in vain she tries.

The Guarding of a Goddess

I fear her wing is hurt ; how piteously
She flutters round and round, and drops again,
Moaning. The storm has been less kind to her,
I doubt me if she'll ever fly again.
Perchance her wing is broke ; but no, for see !
Now she seems gathering strength—a better flight
This time than last. It may be, if all goes well,
Her wing will heal, and she may soar again.
Vain hope ! it might have been, but cannot now,
For a great flock of her fellows passes by,
And when they see her, she, poor foolish bird !
Flutters towards them, calling. Up they come,
And now she sees the cruel light in their eyes,
And fain would flee. Too late : they set upon her
And beat her down with a great whirr of wings.
She is prone on the ground now ; I can but see
A pair of eyes turned appealingly
Up through a storm of wings to the cold sky.
But swiftly my dream changes, as dreams will ;
I see no birds—why, 'tis not birds at all.
What is it ? Now do I begin to doubt
If 'tis a dream at all. It is no dream !
I feel it is not ; I am stark awake,
And these are grim realities I see.
Slowly the darkness thickens, and I dread
To pierce it, lest the fear clutching my heart
Be made a certainty. But I will look ;
I must relieve this agonizing doubt.
It is—it is ! 'Tis, as I feared, my fellows,
My own race, and perchance, if I look more,
I'll see myself among them ; but no, no !
This were too terrible—too terrible !

The Guarding of a Goddess

Stand back, you despicable cowards ! Alas !
What pitiable toads we men can be !
Is there a creature in the whole round world
But would scorn us ? Is there one poor dumb brute
Could stoop so low ? To set upon the weak,
The fallen,—the whole against the sick, the strong
Against the weak, the many against the one—
'Tis sport, rare sport, for men, this ; and you—*you*
Who pass by quickly, with averted face,
Gathering your garments round you lest pollution
Should touch your spotlessness—what were you doing ?
With what toys were you playing, that engrossed
Your time so much that you had none to spare
For this your sister ? She is fallen low ;
But could you not have saved her, have prevented
This dire calamity ? Or, if not this,
Where were you when she sought to rise again ?
If she had had one helping hand extended
Then in her utmost need, or even a word,
One word of kind encouragement, even now
All might be well. You careless butterflies,
What value have you that you are so proud ?
What have you done for any living thing ?
Are you so far above her whom you fear
Will now contaminate you ? Your own blood !
Yet when you saw her rashly tempt the gale,
Did you e'er lift a warning voice to her ?
Ye knew so well to avoid the rocks yourselves,
Yet her ye would not warn. Oh, she knew not,
She never dreamed of them, carried along
By the high wind upon a racing sea ;
The shock came suddenly—her frail bark struck

The Guarding of a Goddess

On a cruel reef when all seemed going well,
The sun shone bright, and all was merriment.
This was the time you chose, this hour of need,
To point the wicked finger of scorn at her,
When every nerve should have been strained to render
Assistance to her in her perilous plight.

Brothers and sisters, we are scarcely men—
At least, if we consider the true type
Of perfect manhood Him whom most of us,
In more or less degree, profess to follow,
Whose name so rashly most of us adopt
With scarce a thought. If we care naught for Him,
Care not even to attempt the path He points,
What boots it that we know He lived and died
At such a time, in such a place, and know
Who He was, whence He came, and all about Him?
To have all such things at our finger-tips
What good, if we will heed not His advice,
Or do one thing He wishes? Can we say
That there is a comparison between
The love we lavish on ourselves and that
Cheap article our brother has to shift with?
We ought to scorn to offer anything
Whose worth is less than that we take ourselves.
We do in most things, but ('tis surely strange)
In this we think how virtuous we are
If the gift's worth a hundredth part of that
For private uses kept. So in this matter
It seems the tendency is more and more
For each to find the supplies he needs himself;
What's over then we generously give
To our next neighbours. But it goes not far,

The Guarding of a Goddess

Our own needs are so great. I ask again,
What boots our knowledge, thorough and complete
As it may be, of these things, if we heed
Not Him of whom they tell? What boots it? Nothing;
'Tis worse than nothing; it were better far
We were less glib. For how could we be blamed,
If we obeyed not the commands of one
Who never lived, we thought? It is not well
Too close to follow a fictitious hero,
However good or great his counsel seems.
But, fools that we are, we take vast credit to us
For our cheap knowledge, and never seem to see
That by these same professions (so oft uttered,
So wearying too) we but condemn ourselves.
Out of our own mouth surely are we judged.
We are taught the absorbing science of religion
On all sides now, but as an art it seems
'Tis doomed to be neglected still awhile.

Now is the time to practise it, if we will!
Stand back and give the drooping creature air!
Brothers, brothers, let us be men for once—
Let's throw off our reproach; we will be men
This once, if we have never been before,
Nor are again. If she were sent to hell,
Would you ask God to let you into heaven?
Could you? Could you? Surely you're not so low,
Not quite so low, as to be capable
Of that. I trust—I am sure—He would not heed you
Till you had gone down into hell yourself,
Sought her among the flames, and brought her up,
And, holding her hand, stood before His throne,
And said (for the first time acting the true man)

The Guarding of a Goddess

‘God, here she is. I never will take aught
Of good that is denied her. She and I
Must stand or fall together. If she goes
Back into hell, at least send me there, too.’
Ah, what rejoicing there would be in heaven
At those words! For there naught is loved so much
As the sight of a man standing a man confessed
After an ignominious masquerade
In the character of something meaner far
Than brute. But we will not wait to be men
So long. Now—now’s the time! Stand back—stand
back!

Put a curb on yourselves, and look with me
Into those lustrous eyes. They fire your heart,
Do they? Then let them fire your heart to do
The first thing you have ever done that’s noble.
Oh, she is beautiful! Shall she, through you,
Because you must have food for your self-love,
And for your fleeting pleasures—shall she mar
That beauty? Oh, if she has only that,
Only for that, then, stand aside; for once
Efface yourselves, prove you can really love,
By leaving her alone, letting her have
Time to recover somewhat. Oh, my brothers!
That beauty, so entrancing, is all wasted,
If ’tis a shrine which, though it should hold a goddess,
Holds but a worthless idol of cheap clay;
And it must change: the devil in paradise
Would quickly assimilate the loveliness
To himself, and make it hideous like himself.
Have you not seen it—you yourself—too oft?
A face which once must have been beautiful,

The Guarding of a Goddess

But now !—ah, how the lovely shrine has changed !
'Twas built to hold a goddess, but instead,
By some mischance—some culpable neglect,
Perhaps—the goddess is no longer there,
She came at rare and rarer intervals,
And then one day—one evil, evil day—
She slipped out unobserved, none staying her,
Nor e'er returned. A light, unlovely thing
Sits in her seat, and now to her low mind
With ruthless hand conforms the fair abode
Till 'tis scarce recognisable. Oh me !
Who could have had the heart to aid the deed ?
And yet how many aid and how few hinder !
And 'twill be done again now—brothers, shall it ?
Oh, if you love her beauty, would not lose it,
If only for yourselves, then stand aside !

Sisters, this is your opportunity !
I have prevailed upon them to be men
For once—see, they stand back—now 'tis your turn.
Forget yourselves, your boasted spotlessness.
Run to her, raise her up, dress her poor wounds,
Try if you cannot reinstate her soon
Among the goddesses; or, if not this,
Among the women who adorn their name.
Oh, you have tender hearts. Can you refuse
To help your sister when she needs your help ?
Come, I will trust her to your tender hearts.

And now, sister—for let me name thee so ;
Would that our kinship we remembered
More often ! but so small our hearts and minds
We scarce can grasp it. Sister, I have shown

The Guarding of a Goddess

What 'tis I dread for thee. If I've said aught
To offend or shame thee, if I've said too much,
Forgive ; for what I've uttered, I have dared
For love of thee. Love covers many sins.
I love thee, and I cannot bear to see
Thy goddess leaving thee. For not so oft
Seems she to visit this her perfect shrine
As in past days. Oh, guard her carefully ;
Let her not go ; pray her to dwell with thee.
Believe me, thou'rt not half so beautiful
When she is not where 'tis her right to be.
The shrine without her, glorious though it is,
Chills and oppresses me, and seems a lie.
A beauteous shrine, but the goddess is not there !
Oh, what more heart-rending than to roam o'er
A splendid temple, searching high and low
For her, the goddess whom you fain would worship,
And, meeting traces of her on all sides,
Still to be baffled, still to find her not,
Still to seek, still find all cold and empty !
Ah me ! you're fain to curse the loveliness
Itself at last ; it makes the emptiness
Only the more apparent.

Sweet, I trust
You grasp what I would say. Be beautiful !
Bodily beauty will not last : oh, strive
For that which will, and which will grow more bright
With flying years. The inner from the outer
Was never yet produced. All things work outward :
Light spreads from a centre ; make the centre sure.
But how ? Here I have little to suggest,
I fear ; all I can urge is, Seek Him out,

The Guarding of a Goddess

Him who is answerable for your being ;
Seek Him, and make a point of finding Him,
Though the task be hard. Yet why should it be hard ?
Surely, when two are set upon a thing,
It needs but little to accomplish it,
Where One's all-powerful. Slight introduction
Can be required where both are seeking it.
I know the world grows wearier every day
Of creeds and curious observances,
Draperies we will insist on hanging round
Religion's beauteous form, oft hiding it
Effectually from view. With all these things
We've no concern ; what we must have is God,
To-day as ever. He is very great,
Hence very simple, too : a lofty Mountain
To trim rose-gardens with their quaint conceits
Is He to current creeds. And He is Love ;
Then seek Him, never doubting He must hear—
Seek how and where you will ; it matters not,
If only you can catch one glimpse of Him.

I fear that on my ill-accustomed lips
The words seem cant ; still, I must utter them,
Though they be words alone, for I'm convinced
There is no surer road to happiness,
And that sweet place where Love and Beauty dwell.

THE TIDE AND THE THRUSH

(Written for Music)

SWEETLY the thrush
Calls from the copse ;
Slow to his glowing bed
Weary day drops.

Dark on the stream
The fishing fleets ride.
Up from the golden west
Rolls the flood-tide.

Fathers, come home
Tired of the sea,
Nod by their firesides,
Baby on knee.

Just such an evening,
The tide and the thrush !
Quick steps on the gravel—
Hush, sweet one, hush !

Father will come
Never again.
That black winter night,
The wind and the rain !

Why art thou fretting ?
Canst thou not rest ?
Darling, sleep sound,
Caught close to my breast !

HOME

WHAT'S that you say ? I have no home to reach ?
There is no welcome-home awaiting me,
When, all the perils of the journey o'er,
With all its sorrows and its countless joys,
At last I set my foot across the threshold
Of that unknown domain at the far end ?
Perhaps you say that I am fanciful,
That not alone is none to welcome us
When we have run our race, but that this race—
This very race we are all so keen about,
In which we weep aloud or laugh with glee ;
This race we run whether we will or no,
Started upon our course by unknown hands,
Without consent or wish of ours ; this race
In which we jostle one another so,
Striving so fiercely to obtain the prize,
Spurning the weaker 'neath our foot, and fighting.
Elbowing our way to the front, each for himself,—
This race, surely the weirdest ever run,
No runner knowing why or whence or whither,
Lo ! after all, our frenzied eagerness,
The cruel little kicks and cuffs we deal
Promiscuously to all who hinder us

Home

Upon our way—ah yes ! and equally
All the kind words we have uttered to weak runners,
The helping hands stretched out, the sacrifices
Of selfish interests on the altar of Love—
These things and everything have been in vain ;
We have run our race indeed, but now 'tis run
All's done, and after all our eagerness,
Oh, how mistaken ! see, there is no one here,
No one has watched with kindly interest,
Noting the failures and success of each,
With a smile or a tear, and sympathy for all,
Even more eager to give away the prizes,
Perchance, than we to obtain them—one to cry,
' Well done, my lad ! You have run splendidly ;
And, sportsmanlike, as I rejoiced to see,
You honoured others' rights even as your own.
Here is your prize ;' these words to one, to each
A kindly utterance apportioned to his merit,
With equal sympathy in praise and blame.
To him, ' Go back and run your race again ;
You did not try : you have done very ill ;'
And him, ' I saw : you thought I did not see ?
I saw the treacherous foot in a rival's path,
All the unmanly, cowardly tricks you played—
How heedlessly you shouldered him aside ;
On him you trampled, with a savage word
For hindering you ; and him, who bravely ran,
Though weak and ill, unfitted to compete,
At him you sneered, and took a cruel delight
In rendering his slow progress slower. Oh !
I am ashamed that I must call you man.
Ah yes ! you would say it is my fault. Perhaps !

Home

I should not have expected you to run
Alone, without assistance ; but I thought
(How foolishly you have given me cause to know)—
I thought you would be proud to be a man,
Would glory in the privilege of running
A race where all depended on yourself.
I meant you for a man, not for a child.
Now stand aside ! Make way for these to approach.
I must attend to you and such as you
Anon. A task more pleasing now is mine.'

No ! there is no one here ! There is nothing here !
Nothing, except a horrible yawning gulf,
Black, blank, and bottomless,—we must go on,
No turning back—on, on, over the brink,
And now, down, down for ever ! seeing nothing,
Down through the empty nothingness of chaos
Till Nothing absorbs us, and we're nothing, too !
But, ere we fall, can we not cry a warning
To those behind—' Stop, stop ! oh, come not on !
Run back for your lives ! We all have run for nothing,
From Nothing, and to Nothing. Oh, return !
Cry on that pitiless, remorseless Hand
Who makes us run—to Nothing—'gainst our wills ;
Oh, cry aloud to him ! down on your knees !
Implore him not to set another out
Upon this hideous course ! Nay, more than this :
Pray him to take you back from whence you came.'
Nay, this were all as horrible ! for, see,
A chasm yawns behind even as before ;
We cling precariously to a strip of land
Between two black, unfathomable abysses !
'Tis all in vain. On, on they come ; and we—

Home

Oh, what for us? One moment on the brink
We totter, then—down in one fearful plunge!

Nay, but perhaps this is not your belief :
There is a something at our journey's end,
Something for us—what, we must wait to learn.
But there is no one there! no one awaits us ;
Within a palace no doubt a feast is spread,
Where, after our race, we may refresh ourselves.
Oh, we shall certainly be very happy !
For all is ready and waiting for us there—
All's waiting for us there—except a welcome !
Oh, man, do you tell me there's a welcome lacking !
Then that is lacking which I most desire.
Oh, I care not to run, I cannot run,
If no one heeds ; my feet must lose their swiftness.
And at the last I must drop down, not tired
With running, but withered with listlessness,
Withered utterly, as a tender plant
In the hot sun.

Ah me ! how sweet it is,
After an outing on a summer's day,
When every hour has been filled up with blisses,
Full as a summer's day of sun and flowers,
Homeward to travel through the evening's dusk,
When twilight falls, and dews gleam in the grass.
What is awaiting us? At home, we know,
Good things are spread for hunters' appetites,
Couches are there to rest our weary limbs ;
But think you we should reck aught of these things
If by the way there met us one with news,
Black news : our home was now a home no more,

Home

For in our absence, while we made so merry,
A grim, relentless Shadow entered there,
Nor passed out unaccompanied—with him
He bore our loved and loving ones away ?
Home—home ? What home would there be then for us
And that thought had been with us all the day,
All through our pleasures running unobserved,
And like the crown of all—the thought of home,
Of loving faces clustering round to hear,
Eager as we to tell, all we had done,
And all so glad once more to be together !
Oh, tell me not there is a welcome lacking !

I seem to see my father standing there,
Upon the threshold of that distant palace,
Awaiting me. I have been somewhat long
In coming ; he has been there for many years.
I look to see a smile light up his eyes,
A smile of welcome ; but no ! never a smile,
Only upon his face a dull, set look
Of hopelessness and misery ; scarcely
Can he find will to say, ‘ I am glad you’ve come.’
He takes me by the hand and leads me in
All silently, treading with listless steps,
As if the palace were a house of mourning.
He shows me to the spacious banquet-hall ;
I spy most tempting dishes on the board,
But all untouched, the guests all stand in corners,
Whispering together, or gazing idly round,
With listless arms a-dangle at their sides,
And drooping heads. ‘ When will the feast begin ?’
I whisper to my father. He in tones

Home

Dull and monotonous, 'Do you take your fill ;
None of us care to eat.' And then, at length,
When I press questions, sudden he cries aloud,
With arms swung up above his head, 'Oh me !
He is not here ! He is nowhere to be found !
He whom I looked to greet me on the threshold,
He who was with me as I ran my race,
Ever at my side with a smile, a cheering word,
Or wisest counsel—when the race was run,
I looked to find Him waiting ; but no, no !
No one was there ! I have not found Him yet.
Years have dragged by, and now my hope is dead.'

He ceases ; into his eyes creeps again
That terrible, dull look of hopelessness.
And then he adds, 'Why came you here so soon ?
I would have warned you all, but I could not—
'Tis useless here to expect happiness.
Truly the flowers and birds are wonderful,
All is lovely ; and all a dreary waste.
Oh, what is home if Father be not there ?'
A silence falls ; nor does he speak again.

Oh, man, you would not tell me this is so ?
Your whisper, if believed, for me would rob
Life of all happiness, even as a plant
Is sapped by the tiny worm : and foolishness
Seem all things, whether they bring laughter or tears,
Or high enthusiasm, if at the last,
Reaching our journey's end, we find no home,
No fatherly hand stretched out to welcome us.

But, whisper as you will, I fear you not ;
For—rightly or wrongly—since I cannot help it,
I do expect to have a welcome-home.

A ROBIN ON THE CLIFF

ROBIN, up there on the topmost spray,

Singing away

So lustily,

What is it you see

That is hid from me ?—

Tell me, tell me, I pray !

On a bramble branch, at the utmost brink

Of this tall cliff, so sombre and grey,

You have perched, and now, never stopping to think,

You pour out your heart in a lyric so gay,

Of such marvellous spontaneity,

That the little notes, as they tumble out,

Seem almost to trip one another up,

Like water that bursts from a narrow spout

When the rain comes down in floods on the town,

As if it would never stop !

I have heard little maidens laugh like you,

And the sound so free has been to me

Like rain to a parchèd plant,

So now you feed me with hopes anew

With your little, light-hearted chant.

But I—but I am down here in the gloom,

A Robin on the Cliff

And though your words move me, the grey cliff's above me,
 So I cannot sing like you ;
For there you sit 'twixt earth and sky,
And the sun beams down on you from on high,
 Gilding your every plume,—
 But *I* am below in the gloom.

Yet know, friend robin, of me and you
I am the wiser of the two,
 So the world would say ;
For where's the occasion for all that emotion ?
Not one of us has the ghost of a notion !

 Yet stay—
A little child perhaps might tell,
If only he knew earth's language well.
I was once such a wild-hearted thing, I'll admit,
But I have grown older and wiser, too,
 (And sadder—alas ! it is true !),
And now of course it would never do
For me to give way to such a fit
 Of delirious joy,
Ev'n supposing that I could attain to it
 (I almost could, when a boy).

Yet such sweet folly has charms for me,
So strong that I'd willingly risk the world's scorn,
And climb up to you this very morn,
And learn from you your ecstasy—
 Where it is born.

But, alas ! such a climb must needs take time,
So I'm fain be content with this halting rime
Until I can reach you. Perhaps I may
 Some day.

SUNSHINE AFTER RAIN, AND A BLACKBIRD

THE rain has ceased—what a downpour it was !
The birds sing out, and flood the air with sound ;
Ah ! what new joys has that mad blackbird found,
Pouring his heart out, only just because
(Or so it seems) the dying sun has shone
With mellow radiance on the daisied grass ?
Why, wait a moment ; he will soon be gone,
And ere he can return the night must pass.
Yet, blackbird, whether thou be mad or no,
Thy heavenly raptures thrill me thro' and thro',
And now they soothe my heart, and now they make it
 bound.

THE BEND OF THE ROAD

' Skies so blue and grass so green !'

As my way I went I rested,
 Leaning o'er a mossy wall,
Where the wren and robin nested,
 And the quick, shy lizard darted ;
I felt wondrously light-hearted,
 For the sun laughed down on all.

I could not but stop and dally
 With delights of sight and sound ;
Now I gazed across the valley,
 Whence the merle's clear call came floating,
And I heard, while scarcely noting,
 Sweet accompanists around.

How the thrushes talked together
 From their outposts in the trees !
In the Spring the dreariest weather
 Is made bright by their rich voices ;
Dull the ear which not rejoices,
 Hearing their high ecstasies !

The Bend of the Road

On and up the white road travelled
Till 'twas lost beyond the hill ;
Sounds that scarce could be unravelled—
Song of chaffinch and of bunting,
Mingled with a murmuring fountain—
Did the sportive breezes fill.

Still disputing at their labours,
Rooks passed by with heavy flight ;
There, aloof from all his neighbours,
At the gate of heaven adoring,
Far aloft the lark was soaring,
Showering earth with his delight.

In the hedges, like Spring's greeting,
Shone the starry celandine ;
In the fields the young lambs' bleating,
Sound of chains and harness creaking,
Ploughboys to their horses speaking—
All these mingled joys were mine.

Quietly the streams were flowing
Through the pastures green and rich ;
All life's wheels, now set a-going,
And well oiled, were steadily working,
Blithely, without haste or irking,
Moving forward without hitch.

Far away white gulls were roving
Round the shores where the tides creep,
And the ships, like phantoms moving,
Hanging 'twixt the sky and ocean,
Glided on with silent motion,
Mirrored in the glassy deep.

The Bend of the Road

All these things I noted gladly,
 Keeping serious thought at bay ;
Till, half sweetly and half sadly,
 Out of those unknown dominions
 Where thoughts dwell, on airy pinions
 One came floating down my way.

Some way back, the road behind me
 Did, I saw, abruptly curve
Round a tall rock ; to remind me
 Of my earlier journey, prior
 To that bend (where the cliff rose higher)
 There was nothing that might serve.

Strange, I thought, how strange it would be
 If, as in a dream might chance,
(Half I wish that such things could be)
 In this lovely spot I found me,
 Knowing naught of all around me,
 Save the sights that met my glance !

On a golden morn, as this is,
 With no trace of ugliness,
'Twere the sweetest of sweet blisses
 Here in mystery to wander,
 On the great unknown to ponder,
 Quite hemmed in with loveliness.

Such is Life ; on, on we travel—
 But whence?—'tis a mystery yet
Never mortal can unravel—
 For ('tis strange), when some fine morning
 We come round this white road's turning,
 What's behind we straight forget !

The Bend of the Road

Oft with longing on a painting
Of some simple woodland scene
Have I gazed ; ah, how enchanting
There to wander, guessing solely
What's beyond, yet trusting wholly
Skies so blue and grass so green !

So, when we have sunny weather,
And the lark sings in the sky,
And we're all at work together—
Fears which in dark days perplex me
Die, and doubts no longer vex me,
And I love Life's mystery.

PICTURES IN BLANK VERSE

I. SUNDAY EVENING (APRIL).

THERE are no folk about—I'm all alone
(Here at the open window), save when pass
Up the near road a pair of happy lovers,
I can just see them o'er the ivied wall,
And hear their voices murmuring. Below stairs,
My sister singeth sweetly—for aught else
There might be no one in the house, it is
So still. I have been dull and sad, but now
The gentle wistfulness of the evening hour
Steals softly over me and fills my heart.
The sun, so bright at noon, is going down
Behind grey clouds, I trow, into the sea ;
Rain has begun to fall, though scarce enough
To damp the gravel on the garden path,
And gem the daisies dreaming in the field,
Each folded for the night. A few late gnats
Still swing beneath the garden shrubs ; the birds
Are very happy, busily preparing
To take their rest, and wing their rapid way
To various homes, whether up 'neath the eaves,
Aloft in the high branches of the firs,
Or in yon newly-budded hawthorn hedge,

Pictures in Blank Verse

So fresh and green. The rooks' hoarse, clamorous talk,
The chitchat of the sparrows on the roof,
Seem without pause, while, floating through the rain,
Comes from the greenwood a gay blackbird's voice,
Telling of summer days and flowers, and brooks,
That, crystal-clear, sing in the shady woods,
Or smoothly flow along the meadows. Hark !
In yonder church a thousand voices raise
The evening hymn, which sweetly comes to me
Adown the breeze—to me, as I sit alone.

II. A SANCTUARY (JUNE)

HERE at the edge of the cliff, half hid from view
By clumps of gorse, now all ablaze with gold,
I've found a little strip of smooth greensward,
With daisies sown. The weary traveller here,
Resting his head on his old mother's bosom,
Kissed by the sun, caressed by the soft breeze,
Scenting the fragrance of the succulent grass—
What could he wish more on a day like this
For his refreshment ?

Fleecy cloudlets float
High overhead, lost in great seas of blue,
Where the sun reigns resplendent. Here and there
You may catch glimpses through the gorse bushes
Of ocean fast asleep, all shimmering,
With a white sail or two. There is no sound
Save for the rhythmical plashing of the waves
At the cliff's foot, and every now and then
A jackdaw's creaking note.

Pictures in Blank Verse

O, mighty Mother !

Here let me lie pressed close to thy kind breast ;
Thou wilt not laugh at me, I know, for shedding
A tear or two. Oh, Mother, let me pour
My troubles in thine ear, and comfort me,
As thou hast done so oft, with soothing voice,
And with thy gentle hand caressing me,
The while I lay my head in thy soft lap.

I shall arise and go upon my way
A better man, buoyed up once more with hope.

III. A JULY MORNING

'Tis very still—a hush on land and sea ;
Beneath the cloudy skies no sound is heard
Save when a boatman calls across the bay
Below me, or a stray bee murmurs by,
To swell the throng who pass the sultry noon
Musing around yon blossomed bramble spray,
Which showers the grass with petals. I am alone—
Not lonely, there is no room in my heart
Just now for loneliness—life is too sweet.

See how the grasses nod in the light breeze !
A homely butterfly in russet suit
Flits idly by—he, too, seems all alone,
The only one astir. Lo ! the white gulls
Rising and falling on the heaving tide !
There is a cormorant laboriously
Winging his way over the waste of waters,
Over the silvery waters, on and on ;
I watch him till he dwindles to a speck,
And then is lost in the vast. On some lone crag,

Pictures in Blank Verse

Far in the ocean, he will sit for hours,
Scanning the face of the deep.

The skies are dark,

But in the north I see a widening rift,
Where, in the blue, long strips of grey cloud lie,
Like sandbanks when the tide is running in.
Above the white cliffs on the far horizon,
White, high-piled mountain masses rear their heads,
Some mystic region never footed yet
By man. How far away, how faint they are !
'Twixt me and them stretches this wide, wide waste
Of shifting, silvery waters—very still,
But shifting constantly. Dark clouds hang thick
'Bout all the south and east and west, the sun
Can scarcely struggle through them, and old earth
Is wrapped in shadow. But there—there in the north
Lies that blue cleft, and it seems slowly growing,
And now it faintly tinges all the deep,
With azure the grey deep. And a hush broods
O'er sea and land ; all Nature, silent, watchful,
Awaits the issue. . . .

A gentle breeze was blowing

Steadily southward o'er the wave, but now
It seems uncertain, veering now to south,
Now west. Oh, which will win ?—dark clouds in the
south,

In the north that peep of blue ! . . . A drop of rain
Falls on my book ; and now it patters round
Upon the bushes and rustles in the grass.
That homely butterfly buries himself
Deep in the herbage, and the flustered bees
With sacs half-filled, start on their homeward way.

Pictures in Blank Verse

The clouds are coming up out of the south
Fast, fast, and on the horizon that faint blue
Dies forlorn. So the time is not yet come,
The rain is setting in again, 'twill be
A grey, wet afternoon. . . . Not yet—not yet!

TO A RED ADMIRAL

HIGH on the hedge against the sky,
While the idle hours lag by,
You sit and sun yourself, or feed,
Draining that flower's cup of meed,
 Your wings with joy vibrating,
For life is sweet and the hour draws nigh
 Which you and she are waiting.

Bright butterfly, you are small, 'tis true,
And yet, oh, how majestic, too !
Whether o'er the hedge you swoop,
Or sit with wings that rise and droop,
 As charged too full of pleasure,
Beauty and strength I find in you
 Blended in perfect measure.

How, when a child, my heart would beat,
If with you I chanced to meet
On a sunny summer day ;
Wild music in my breast did play,
 And thrill my being o'er ;
And life became more grand and sweet
 Than I had known before.

To a Red Admiral

Oh, that I might revive at will
That music which my breast did fill !
Vain longing ! I must be content
If, listening in wonderment,
 With tuned ear I hear
Echoes from childhood's fresh green hill—
 Alas ! how faint and far !

TO A DAISY, ALONE ON A MOOR

ALL alone, little flower, all alone !
And have you no fear ?
Around you for miles lies the waste,
And no comrades near.

Yet how serene is the gaze
That you turn to the sky !
Though you tremble in the soft breeze
As it whispers by,
I cannot think 'tis in fear,
But in ecstasy.

You affront me, little flower !
The disparity
Between you and me is great,
And yet now when I
Feel alone and afraid, you dare fling in my teeth
Your tranquillity.

And yet so much, little flower,
Do I envy your state,
If you'll teach you—though you are so small
And I call myself great—
I will pocket my pride, and take lessons from you,
If 'tis not too late.

WHEN THE YEAR IS YOUNG

OH, what a day ! wind and sun, wind and rain,
 Passionate tears, and wanton laughter, too :
Now I look through a streaming window-pane,
 And see black clouds driven across the blue,
Lashing the earth with hail ; I look again,
 Through the clear heavens the free winds rove anew,
Along the wall in riotous sport they run,
Till the wet ivies dance, and glisten in the sun.

In perfect paroxysms of ecstasy
 The bushes shake themselves ; the half-clad trees
Wildly gesticulate and vainly try
 To tell out to the sun and the swift breeze
The joy they all feel, though for them too high
 To express ; the shrinking flowers can have no peace
From the rough wind—but, knowing a full heart
Oft best finds utterance thus, they take it in good part.

WHAT I SAW AT SUNSET

THE sun is sinking to the western wave,
Slow and majestic ; right across his face,
Half veiling it, is laid one long white feather,
Spanning the heavens ! Blown up from the damp south-
west,

Grey mists come straggling, trailing their long robes,
Until at times they almost sweep the ground,
Moistening the atmosphere and blotting out
At intervals the light ; now caught and kissed
By the amorous monarch, as they're flying past him,
Kissed till they blush a rosy red for shame ;
And now again by him shot through and through
With myriad golden darts, until they seem
Soaked in a golden fluid, like a sponge.
Their good-night salutations thus received,
Each goes upon her way, once more arrayed
In soberer garmentry.

Here, close at hand,
Beneath me all is green—the elms stand rapt,
Silent in solemn shadow ; 'twixt their trunks
I can discern smooth lawns with daisies pied,
And catch at times faint trills of merry laughter
From folk at play there. Up above my head

What I saw at Sunset

The starlings call 'Clink ! clink !' among the eaves—
Above them there is naught but the blue sky,
So far ! In this vast amphitheatre,
Roofed in with sapphire, arabesqued with white,
Beside the moving mists I can see naught
But swifts that dart and turn this way and that,
Propelled by their little arrowy wings
That never cease vibrating, bearing down
The tiny helpless insects that in vain
Essay to dodge them. In a body now,
They rush close by me on the balcony,
Uttering their whistling cries like 'scaping steam ;
And now—lo ! there they are among the clouds !

Ah, careless, careless birds, ye little know
Your privileges ! Could I fly like you,
Think you that I would ever rest content
Until—even though at imminent risk of life—
I had shot up and on, away and away,
Leaving my comrades, past those heedless mists
That travel on so slow, staking my all
To ascertain what 'tis that moves my heart
There—there among the clouds—yon golden clouds
The sun is splintering—there amid the blue.
Oh, can ye not discern it ? 'Tis so faint,
'Tis so impalpable ; and yet it is
So real it fills the gazer's heart with tears.
Staring away at yon wide tract of sky,
There where the blue and gold melt into one,
Forging a tint so faint you scarce can tell
What hue to name it ; where a space is cleared,
With little rosy bars of cloud hard by,
And tiny feathery white ones tinged with gold—

What I saw at Sunset

Thus staring at the pale blue vast, I seem
Standing upon the threshold of a world
Beyond my ken. High things are doing there,
Such things as one can dream of in the night,
And, waking, tax his brain in vain for words
To tell the vision—there's no medium
Common to earth and that high, rich dream-world
Where late he moved ; there but remains a sense
Of aching longing and bewilderment.
High things are doing there ; but I must sit
All helpless here, for how to set about
Such voyage of discovery I find not.

I've seen a foxglove peeping o'er a wall,
To fill me with dim visions of delights
That dwell within the garden, manifold,
But inaccessible, alas ! I've heard,
When shut up all alone with dull old books,
Enchanting melodies and girlish laughter,
In bright rooms where the dance is in full swing,
Where the heady wine of life is freely flowing,
And all is gaiety. Through the close green leaves
Of some tall hedge I've peered in boyish days,
Straining my eyes in vain attempt to see
The field wherein two great elevens have met,
And strive for victory ; hearing the shouts
And catching at times tantalizing glimpses
Of men in white hither and thither running,
While the skies ring with cheers. When younger still,
How oft on sunny summer morns I've hung
For hours at some wide casement, looking out
Upon the waving grasses and the trees,
Where unknown pleasures lie concealed ; and watched

What I saw at Sunset

The butterflies that strayed into the garden,
To dally there a while among the flowers,
Among the rhododendrons and the lilacs,
And then fly past me up the side of the house
(So close I almost touched them with my hand),
Then o'er the roof and away ! What tugged at my
heart,

Wondering whither they went and whence they came ?

. . . What'er it was, the same emotion now

Has met me on life's road. Who knows ?—perchance,

Even as long since I thoroughly explored

The fairy haunts of those gay butterflies,

Which once, a prisoner, I had viewed afar,

Some day—some day, it may be mine to learn

What 'tis I catch there in that golden cloud

That floats in the pale blue so far aloof,

And seems the skirt of some majestic king,

Who sweeps by with his gorgeous retinue,

Unseen of mortal eye ! It may be mine,

Some day, to take my part in those high deeds,

To fight in worthy wars for the King's sake,

And be as noble and as glorious

As I would be, and as the tiny fragments

I've chanced on in me, like stray grains of gold

Hidden in common clay—or like the leaven,

Which, if I'm careful, should in course of time

Leaven the whole lump. Oh, it should be so !

For on all sides I'm haunted with vague hints,

Suggestions of romance ; and am I never

To do aught higher than just prate about them ?

Stay ! but now I spoke of a high-walled garden
O'ertopped with foxgloves : could I not at length,

What I saw at Sunset

After long searching, find the gate and enter ?
The gate—the gate ? Is Death that gate, I wonder ?

* * * * *

Who would have thought that after what I've seen,
I should be sitting here in a dull room
With frowsy books around ? 'Tis a grey world
Without and in, to-night. There's scant romance,
God wot, in my surroundings now. Ah, well,
'Tis ever so with us. God sends His angel
To take us by the hand and lead us up
To some high mount, to drink in the pure air
And stare spell-bound at paradise afar,
Shimmering all indistinct as some mirage.
Like Moses viewing the Promised Land—the land
Flowing with milk and honey—from Pisgah's top,
Knowing he might not enter ; so we gaze,
Knowing our time is all too short, and knowing
Our empty life must swallow us up again,
Too soon. All else forgotten, 'neath our hand
We gaze, our eyes drink in the sight, as men
Found dying of drought in sandy wildernesses
Will drain the proffered cup.

But even now
The angel plucks us by the sleeve—'tis time,
We must be going. With one backward look
And a deep sigh, we turn and follow him,
To plunge once more into the barren plains.
And the loftier the mountain-top the greyer,
Darker, emptier, drearier, seem the plains.

But we have seen, and though we see no more
For days, and find naught to recall the sight,
We know that what we saw was more than dream.

A BALLAD OF THE NIGHT

A HOT, black night, and an endless road,
Big rain like blood, and the beat,
Hour after hour, mile after mile,
Of my horse's galloping feet.
And mile after mile, hour after hour,
One sole thought buzzed through my brain :
'Is there time—time ?' and into his flanks
I dug the spurs again.

There is music and mirth in the castle to-night,
But the maiden's cheeks are deathly white.
Courage, brave heart ! there is one at hand
With whom you must fly to a far-off land.

I have flung her across my saddle-bow,
We are off through the gloom like wind,
I duck my head as the shafts whizz past,—
The pursuers press hot behind.
There are angry gods at war in the clouds,
And murderous javelins flash
From behind their black folds ; the whole road is lit up ;
Then the dark : the skies fall with a crash !

The lightning flashes, the thunder peals,
Cruel foemen are spurring hard at our heels ;

A Ballad of the Night

But my lady's hand clings tight to mine,
And the wild blood leaps in my veins like wine.

We have left the wood, and my horse's hoofs
Are clattering down the shore ;
And, lo ! the moon on the silver bay—
The storm and the dark are o'er.
We leap in the boat (there is but one),
Push off, not a moment to spare ;
Then we sail away o'er the moonlit sea,
And leave them cursing there !

Then I laughed a great laugh ; ' Ah, now,' I
cried,
' You are mine—mine—mine ! my love, my
bride !'
She wept in my arms ; and our hearts beat one
tune,
As homeward we flew down the path of the
moon.

TO A LITTLE GIRL - FRIEND,
ON HER CONFIRMATION DAY (DECEMBER)

THE sun has scarcely shown his face
For many and many a day ;
The world has shivered, cold and wet,
Huddled in shawls of grey.

The people were all draggie-tailed,
So were the dumb birds, too ;
We seemed in danger to forget
The sky had once been blue.

But what a change this morn ! The world
Is full of promises ;
Secrets, could we but understand,
Are blabbed by each stray breeze.

The air is charged with tiny drops
Of rain, too light to fall ;
On every fence and naked tree
Hang globules, gleaming all.

To a Little Girl-Friend

A vapour rises from the ground,
The clouds lift from the hills,
The smoke goes straight up into heaven,
The cock his clarion shrills.

The little birds are twittering
Atop of every bush ;
Hark ! did I hear ?—yes, there again—
Actually, 'tis the thrush !

The thrush ! He thinks—as well he may—
'Tis Spring come round already,
So he's turned roysterer again—
Of late he's been so steady !

White gulls glide rapturously along
Over the moving deep,
So grey and vast—what would it tell,
Could it but wake from sleep !

Look ! now the first adventurous ray
Breaks through, and speeds to earth :
More and more follow, and on the sea
They dance in maddest mirth !

Now the old sun, not changed a whit,
Smiles from a cobweb cloud ;
So infectious is his gaiety
That I could laugh aloud !

That I could greet all whom I meet,
At every corner of the street ;
That every living thing I see
Seems a dear comrade unto me.

* * * *

To a Little Girl-Friend

Sweet child ! 'tis a great day for you,
Your heart is beating high ;
Great expectations, hopes, and fears,
Shine out from your bright eye.

It may be, though unconsciously,
You, too, have felt and seen,
That interwoven with your hopes
This wondrous morn has been.

If so, then trust these promises,
These secrets half revealed
In hints dropped by the clouds and sky,
And whispered in the field.

They are for every one of us,
And must for all prove true ;
But just to-day I think they're meant
Especially for you.

So, when cold disappointment comes,
As come it always must,
And the bright castles that you built
Seem crumbling into dust,

And all the hopes that swelled your breast
Seem further off than ever,
Then, let the memory of this day
Your burdened heart deliver.

Then, know that all these promises,
Though they be long deferred,
Shall come at last—is God a man,
That He should break His word ?

TO A TINY FLY,

CRUSHED BY MY FINGER

THE day is bright, and all the world
Seems full of peace and joy ;
'Tis hard to think, in this fair place,
There are things that destroy !

There is a languorous delight
In lying 'neath the trees,
Lazily reading in my book,
While fanned by many a breeze,

Or looking round to be made glad
By seeing on each hand
Things that themselves are full of glee,
As a child might understand.

From those white hazy clouds that dream
Along the southern hills,
To the gauzy flies that whisk about
In waltzes and quadrilles,

To a Tiny Fly

All Nature has agreed this morn
To banish pain and sorrow,
And fill her cup to the brim with bliss
Against a darker morrow.

My soul is lulled by the hum
Of self-complacent bees,
Woody hither by that woodbine trail
That clambers round the trees,

And by the white clover in the grass ;
They loiter by the hour,
As if life were one long, sweet dream,
Grappling the swaying flower.

Over the trees a white butterfly
Comes hither to coquette
Awhile with grass and flowers, and then
Float off without regret.

Here all, so far as I could tell,
To bliss was given o'er.
Who had the heart to plan this woe,
And all so bright before ?

What evil genius prompted you
Across my page to crawl ?
I brushed you thence too clumsily,
And mischief did befall !

Believe me, it was for your sake
I did it, tiny friend,
Lest, when I turned the leaves, you should
Meet an untimely end.

To a Tiny Fly

A moment since, and with the best
You were dancing merrily ;
Now from your troubles death, I fear,
Alone can set you free.

What was your value ? some would ask ;
What did you for mankind ?
Utilitarians like this
To me seem sadly blind !

Of use or not, I recognise
In you as strong a claim
To life as anyone may boast.
Would we all had the same !

Your life, brief as a summer's day,
Was all made up of bliss ;
Then surely you can ill be spared
From such a world as this !

THE DIM RED WEST

LOVE, let us away !
Why do we loiter here upon the shore
Where spirits droop, and hearts are always sore ?
Let us away !
List to the wavelets breaking at your feet,
Whispering ever on in tones so sweet
'Tis pain to hear them. Love, what do they say ?
Oh, listen closely, listen well,
And you may tell !—
'Away, away !'

Love, I am weary,
Weary of all the petty toils and strife,
The sum of this unsatisfying life,
This life so dreary !
Let us embark upon the silver tide,
And sail to the dim red west that looks so wide,
So wonderful. The night is drawing nigh ;
O Love, step into my little boat,
And away we'll float,—
Love, you and I !

The Dim Red West

Oh, we must go !
We've hesitated here too long. Embark !
The sun has gone to rest, and it grows dark ;
Come, let us go !
See, o'er Day's brow Night draws her dusky hair ;
Ne'er have I seen the waters look so fair,
Calm, vast, and shimmering in the waning light !
... Love, fear not ! If we're side by side,
Be the ocean ne'er so wide,
All must be right !

Love, 'tis the best
My heart can wish, to sail away with thee
Into the vast that looks Infinity,
That dim red west !
Who knows what we may find there? I have thought
We might discover what we've missed so long,
What haunts us in our dreams, in the waves' song,
And in all loveliness, till tears are brought
Up to our eyes. O Love, no longer stay !
Over the silver waters come away !
We'll surely find it in that magic west,
And bear the tidings home again
To end this sad world's pain—
And then, to rest !

AT MY WINDOW

How slow this drowsy summer afternoon
Doth wear away ! I've flung the casement wide,
And now am borne on a full, waveless tide
Of mingled blisses. Near, I hear the drone
Of murmurous bees ; afar, tune after tune
An organ reels off, bringing thoughts to me
Of stirring city life, like the great sea—
Here 'tis a quiet pool. Lo ! the white moon,
Yawning, looks down on the still meads, that sleep
Drownèd in sunshine ; you may wade waist-deep
In their long grass. How lovingly the blue
Bends o'er the hill, where the wayward hedge runs wild,
Lit with red poppies ! Now one white sea-mew,
Gliding with moveless wing, deliciously
Cleaves the soft azure, and a strange, sweet bliss
Steals over me : I am once more a child,
My mother bendeth o'er me tenderly,
Imprints a kiss upon my brow—a kiss
Of power my infant sorrows to dispel,
And fill my breast with peace ineffable.

A NEW ANECDOTE FOR FATHERS

THE thick rain fell in measured, grim,
Uncompromising pour ;
Its fixed intent it plainly told—
To fall for evermore.

It heeded none—few heeded it
In all that busy town ;
But one (the corners of her mouth
Drawn ominously down),

Gazed : it was but a little girl
Who sought with anxious eyes
For a faint ray of hope to break
From the grey, sodden skies.

Much hung on it, as her grave face,
Pressed to the window-pane,
Bore witness ; but not one breeze stirred,
And hope seemed all in vain.

No wind would take her part ; and, sure,
Nothing could e'er break through
That solid mass—there was no gap,
Not even one speck of blue.

A New Anecdote for Fathers

She stamped her foot, she shook her fist,
For, think, she was but small ;
And she had planned so much, and now
The rain had spoilt it all.

To-day was her whole holiday ;
How eagerly she had
Looked forward to it all the week !
It really was too bad !

What untold joy about the beach
To race in wind and sun !
While down the shining sands to the sea
The braided brooklets run,

Or tumble headlong down the rocks
In foaming waterfalls,
Eager to mingle once more with her
Who to her children calls

With musical murmur from the shore,
Where the ripples dance and play,
Run up the sand, or round the rocks
Throw up white jets of spray.

What such things mean to a child's mind
Staid elders scarce can see.
From children and their *useless* joys
We turn impatiently !

With dolorous face the little lass
Still gazed out on the street ;
With exasperating deliberateness
Still on the rain did beat.

A New Anecdote for Fathers

At last she turned away—'twas clear
It never meant to stop ;
'Twas all to spite her—and down her cheeks
The tears rolled drop by drop.

'Come, cheer up, child !' quoth one kind friend,
'Perhaps next Saturday——'
Next Saturday ! Mere empty talk !
Why, that was worlds away.

The elders, each after his kind,
Talked, but not one admitted
Here was a woe for which the child
Might reasonably be pitied.

Some spoke of children who had no bread—
'And count up all your joys !'
Some said as a treat she might play there—
'But don't make too much noise !'

Her father was a right good man—
Also a moralist.
He found this opportunity
More than he could resist ;

He never yet had missed a chance
Of pointing out an error
(Errors abound in other folk)
And now, to the child's terror,

He cleared his throat, and thus began :
'My child ! take care ! be humble !
I wonder you are not afraid
Thus openly to grumble !'

A New Anecdote for Fathers

At last, when almost in despair
Of finding what she sought
(Surely a very little thing),
There came a sudden thought.

Off she ran to the room wherein
Her schoolboy brother sat,
Ostensibly at work—just then
Mending a cricket-bat.

To him her tale she told. ‘Poor kid !
What beastly luck !’ he said.
Strange, maybe, but at these rough words
The maid seemed comforted.

THE PARTED COMRADES

I SAW him standing at the water's edge
Alone, gazing out seaward 'neath his hand.
He was a man of humble parentage,
And as I watched him on the lowest strand,
Clad in long seaboots and a blue guernsey,
A sad yet sweet, strange notion came to me,
As if new-wafted out of faeryland.

The day was warm and sunny—such a one
As comes but seldom save when Summer dies,
And sweetly pensive Autumn takes the throne :
Some bright June day, but that the azure skies
Seem purer, and the keen, crisp air accords
Rare buoyancy of soul ; from gathering hordes
Of fallen leaves old fragrances arise.

It seemed Heaven stooped, and with a rapturous kiss
Had hushed the weary, wilful sea to rest :
Like one who swoons from sheer excess of bliss,
'Neath the soft touch he lay ; his swelling breast
And quivering limbs—'twas these alone betrayed
The passion which his mighty being swayed—
Calm, since 'twas all too great to be expressed.

The Parted Comrades

The tide was gently ebbing: down the beach
Slowly but steadily the waves retreat,
Sighing to find yet more beyond their reach
Of that they deemed their own. About the feet
Of the mute gazer now they've ceased to play;
See! one, more daring, makes a last essay—
In vain! I fear the repulse will be complete.

When the tide ebbs, a subtle charm is felt,
Like that sweet sadness autumn days impart;
A gentle melancholy, that doth melt
Into the soul, making the quick tears start;
Far different from the wild joy of the tide's inrush,—
Wild joy such as we feel when from each bush
Spring's voice is heard, and high hopes throng the
heart.

The circles round the rocks sank lower still;
I saw grey points, now here, now there, thrust
through
The smooth, transparent surface; I did fill
My wondering eyes with that vast tract of blue.
And still that man gazed seaward 'neath his hand.
It seemed to me Infinity we scanned.
Then suddenly all was blotted from my view!

The sea was awful—one grey, mountainous waste!
I heard the mad waves crashing on the shore,
There two dark forms were running in wild haste,

The Parted Comrades

Battling with boiling surf, deaf with the roar,
Blinded by spray. One towering billow fell,
Swept up and caught them. What followed, who
can tell?

At last one struggles out—one, and no more.

One now is here, where two so oft have been—
He had a comrade (so I understand),
Until a black storm thrust itself between—
And where the ripples murmur to the sand,
Dancing and quivering in the sun to-day,
On all that blue vast stretching far away,
I see him still gaze seaward 'neath his hand.

AFTER THE DEVASTATING STORM OF
SEPTEMBER 10, 1903

OH, Summer, Summer, tell me where thou'rt fled,
That I may follow and force thee back with me !
Hast thou left Autumn with us in thy stead ?
Autumn is dear, but oh, I long for thee !

Where hidest thou ? For sure thou dost but play
With us ; perchance thy sweet voice will be heard
Again to-morrow ; it ne'er has been thy way
Thus hurriedly to leave without a word.

Thou hast treated us but ill of late, I know ;
Thy tears have been by far too quick to fall ;
Thou hast been sullen, wayward, proud ; but oh !
Only return, and we'll forgive thee all.

But yesterday thou wert with us ; every bough
Was green ; with flowers each hedge and field was
fair :
Now leaves are shrivelled, flowers are dead ; hark how
The distant voices ring on the keen air !

How long have I been slumbering ? Why, oh why,
Didst thou steal from me while I lay asleep ?
To find a friend gone without one good-bye,
Surely this is enough to make one weep !

TRAMPING ACROSS SAUNTON SANDS

THROUGH loose, slippery sand we're dragging
Heavy feet, our spirits flagging ;
On one hand the rolling burrows,
 Bare and drear, shut out the view ;
 On the other, vivid blue,
Laced with white, elov'n into furrows,
And whipped shoreward by the wind
Flying south, fleet-foot behind,
 Leaps the sea, with loud halloo.

The way is long, and we are weary,
And the prospect seems most dreary ;
Miles and miles of dazzling sand
 Stretch before us, brown and grey,
 To the far end of the bay,
Barren tracts on either hand.
There is a shattered hulk with keel
Deep in sand ; the white gulls wheel,
 And quick sandpipers scurry away—
 The sole signs of life are they.

Tramping across Saunton Sands

The keen nor'-wester in our faces
Meets us, salt from the sea, and braces,
Like a tonic, our slack limbs ;
 Yet, although with right good will
 On we trudge and onward still,
Our long journey endless seems.
Courage, comrade ! I have found
Thoughts which make my heart to bound,
 And with hope my bosom fill.

Soon through green lanes we shall ramble,
Where those butterflies do amble,
Chequered like the sun and shade
 Where they flit the live-long day ;
 Where shy rabbits start away,
Flashing white tails ; every glade
Is pranked out with primroses
And violets, 'neath o'erhanging trees
 Which the wandering breezes sway.

Primroses at every turning !
Tranquil scenes for which we're yearning,
As with slipping sand we wrestle ;
 There blue smoke-wreaths calmly rise
 Till dissolved in azure skies,
From a spot where farmsteads nestle,
Which mossed orchard trees embosom,
Green, and gay with creamy blossom—
 Restful pleasures for tired eyes.

Tramping across Saunton Sands

But, far better, there will meet us,
At the farm, bright eyes to greet us ;
We are footsore—we shall rest ;
 We are thirsty—soon may we
 Drain a dozen cups of tea ;
We want company—the best
Waits us : where to man's tired spirits
Find a tonic of such merits
 As sweet eyes of maidens be ?

TO AN ATHEIST

ENOUGH: there need no more be said,
For you have made it all too plain.
I've fought your logic half the night,
But fought in vain.

Well, it is settled—there's no God.
Now, what do you propose to do?
I am the victim of a fear
That's wholly new.

What! going to bed? High time, I know;
But there will be no sleep for me
To-night or e'er again. Think, man!
How can there be?

For who shall say with certainty
That he will wake to-morrow morn?
Or wake not but to find himself
Alone, forlorn?

We know not where or what we are;
We scarce can do a thing we will;
Even to keep with those we love
We have no skill.

To an Atheist

True, all's gone smoothly up to now ;
But when may not the dark storm burst ?
Then would I be in readiness
Even for the worst.

Man, where is our security ?
There may not even be a sun
To-morrow. In this state of things
What's to be done ?

* * * * *

What are you saying ? You have slept
Soundly each night these thirty years ?
And you have never been a prey
To idle fears ?

Then, 'spite of all your arguments
So cogent, though it may seem odd,
I'm satisfied that after all
There is a God !

TO A COMRADE IN DISTRESS

Is life too cruel to you? Do miseries
Rain thick as hail out of the inky skies?
Does never a ray of sunlight struggle through
That stern, unyielding wall? Say, is it true
No sooner is one trouble safely passed
Than straight you're staggering, with fear aghast,
Through a new brood, that seems fresh hatched in hell
For your behoof? You doubt, as you may well,
If any man could suffer so, unmoved,
Or even if one good purpose can be proved
For all this woe.

Comrade, be brave! fight on!

You seek a purpose? Let me point out one.
In these tame days of peace 'tis hard at times,
'Mid stupid self-conceit and sordid crimes,
More fit for worms than men, gross ignorance
That views all things beyond its ken askance—
'Tis hard for simple folk to realise
How great a man may be, how good and wise.
And will you call it but a little thing
If, by your constancy in suffering
And your great mind o'er all things triumphing,
You teach your fellows to know that after all
'Tis possible to rise and not to fall,
And show us by your glorious victory
How grand, how godlike, mortal man may be?

MUSIC, A RIVER, AND A SUNSET

TO MY SISTER. AFTER A CONCERT

OUT from the throng we have stepped, and we stand
Alone by the silver river,
Watching the tide flow ever
Up under the bridges and over the long, brown sand.
In yonder city we've drunk our fill
Of sweetest sounds together ;
And their deep harmonies hither
Have followed us—in our hearts they are echoing still !
Now soft and slow I hear it flow
In a murmurous undertone,
Dropping stray hints alone,
Singing great things which as yet we may not know.
Now, what a change ! A battle-cry—
The tramp of hoofs ! Like one,
With sabres that flash to the sun,
Headlong we sweep in our thousands to victory !
Oh, we were in the thiek of the fight,
Together we thundered, sweeping
The foe all before us, and leaping
Over the trenches, we planted our flag on the height !

Music, a River, and a Sunset

While still the wild thrill of triumphs won
 Beats in music along our blood,
 We watch the silvery flood
Roll calmly, proudly, majestically on.

Calm, strong, and irresistible,
 Softly he circles round
 The sandbanks, till all are drowned,
As all at last must yield to the beautiful.

Black, brooding, wooded banks beyond,
 And the west, all red and golden,
 Thus 'neath the silver wave beholden,
Move the charmed mind to faery fancies fond.

The fisher, now that the dusk comes down,
 Has left his boat to rock
 In the tide, that fain would mock
In its magic mirror the cosy lights of the town.

I have heard of folk who hold it true
 'Twill never unravel, this life,
 This tangle of trouble and strife,
And in dark moments I have thought so, too.

Fair girl, whatever in times of sorrow
 Our darkened spirit fancies
 Of death and dread mischances,
We know we have no need to fear to-morrow.

With our music ringing in our ears,
 And this broad river flowing,
 And yonder bright sky glowing,
Dare we again give place to senseless fears?

Music, a River, and a Sunset

—'Tis past, and all that region blest
Is now left far behind us,
For some dread Power doth bind us
Ever to hurry on and take no rest.

Truth touched us with her golden darts,
Words of magic seeming ;
Darkly the world lay dreaming,
When soft she laid her finger on our hearts ;

We woke. Her beauty who may tell ?
No mortal may reveal it ;
But still—ah, still we feel it,
And now we know, though all seem ill, yet all
is well.

A CHILD'S DREAM

TO E——

OH, I dreamed strange and wondrous things last night !
I sat alone, a little shrinking girl,
Set in the centre of a mighty throng ;
'Twas heaven, I think—a spacious region spread
Immeasurably round us and above,
And far below, like lights of a great city,
There twinkled dim a myriad starry worlds.

One thrust a violin into my hand,
And bade me play ; but I was all alone,
And all that multitude did fix their eyes
On me, and spake not. Long in vain I strove,
Never a sound, my nerveless hands refused
My utmost urging ; not a note would come.
I thought of all those people watching me,
I thought of the great silent spaces round,
And, shut in with myself, and sick at heart,
I sat there powerless, conscious of naught,
Save that I was alone in that great crowd,
All eyes upon me ; an o'erwhelming sense
Of horror grew on me, until at last
I seemed about to drop the instrument,
And tumble headlong 'mong the starry spheres—

A Child's Dream

A dizzy fall. A cry was on my lips,
I had a vision of a sea of faces,
All watching me with mute and wondering looks ;
My loneliness swept o'er me like a flood !
But, just when all seemed lost, out from the throng,
Slow-pacing, came a wondrous white-robed Form,
August, with brow of awful majesty,
So grand, the sight had utterly o'erborne
My spirit, but for the flood of tender light
That clothed Him, chasing fear from every heart
That looked on it. He came to me—to me ;
He put one arm about me, gently took
My trembling fingers in His own, laid them
Upon the strings, and in His thrilling voice,
Deep as the ocean's, tender as a mother's,
He bade me play. Oh, could I choose but play ?
For at His touch I knew myself no more,
My dull self melted like the morning mists,
Like dew when the sun riseth in his splendour !
I feared no longer ; free, free as a bird
Who sings because he's full of melody,
Forgetful of the singer in the song,
I struck the strings. Strangely my bonds had vanished !
I lightly stepped into an aery boat,
Plumed with white sails. I felt Him at my side,
Together we did float away, away,
Over a sea of mingled light and love,
Whose starlit waves chimed ever in my ears
Harmonious sounds unutterably sweet.
That music sang to me of everything
I've ever loved, in life, in books, in dreams.
My mother's kiss, the murmur of the sea,

A Child's Dream

Heather-clad hills, and shouting streams, and larks
Greeting the dawn, the breath of the wild rose,
The scent of new-mown hay, and hum of bees ;
And rainbows when the earth smiles through her tears ;
And curling smoke, and crowing cocks, on morns
When every puddle in the steaming roads
Holds a white sun to mock the sun in heaven :
And silent, heavy-breathing afternoons,
When nothing stirs save the slow bees, that drone
About the sunny garden, diving deep
Down the flowers' throats, till they are lost to view ;
And summer rain that, after a hot day,
Falls steadily at eve with rustling sound ;
And mornings when the schoolroom is a-hum,
The sun makes rainbows in your eyelashes,
And even the figures have romance in them ;
And flaming slopes of gorse, up which you gaze
In wonder, while the restless butterflies
Range up and down, a brook sings at your feet,
And far above—so far—the burning blue ;
And haunted evenings, when you cannot fix
Your mind on books, all Nature holds her breath
To watch the sun's red ball drop slowly down
Over a shimmering sea ; and all the things
The old moon tells you while you lie a-bed,
Half dreaming, half awake, and watch her steer
'Twixt isles of fleecy cloud ; and fairy-tales,
Where scenes change in a most deliciously
Bewildering way ; old Amazonian forests,
Teeming with life, where you can walk, they say,
On creeper bridges high above the ground
From tree to tree for miles ; where monkeys swing,

A Child's Dream

And gaudy parrots screech, and fireflies dance,
And humming-birds, like living sunbeams, hover
O'er flowers of radiant hue ; and summer dreams
By the blue sea, whose silver tide runs in
Soundless and waveless, like a flowing river,
Pushing before it weed and eddying straws ;
And that which in a dusty country church
Steals over you when someone in deep tones
Reads how God's prophet slew the priests of Baal,
Then from a mountain-top searched the horizon
For one small cloud, till all the heavens grew dark,
The wind roared, and the rain rushed down in torrents ;
Or mystic words about the silver cord,
The golden bowl, and pitcher at the fountain ;
Or how the lamb shall no more dread the lion,
The long night break in morning, and black storms
Be all forgotten in eternal rest ;
While rapt you listen, through the open door
The sun streams thick, and on the scented air
Floats from the hills the distant cry of sheep ;
And last, once more, the silver singing sea
Under a summer moon ; and through it all
Kind faces glimmering on me, shadowy forms
Passing and passing—these and all delights
Were present in that music, like shy fawns
That in the greenwood peer at passers-by—
All, all were here, most exquisitely blended !

For hours or æons drowned in seas of wonder,
Like one entranced was I, till a soft breeze
Did waft us gently to the shore ; and then—
By the deep hush, the intent and listening faces,
I knew I had been playing rapturously.

A MEMORY

I SEE them now—two sweeter maids
'Twas ne'er my lot to see.
Their loveliness was such delight,
It felt like pain to me.

We two were walking on the hill,
And the day was passing fair,
And 'twas the crowning joy to view
Those merry children there.

It was the Spring, and everything
Was young and fresh and pure,
A time when hope seems out of place—
Our bliss seems too secure.

Up-hill we went ; young, joyous things
Our footsteps did beguile ;
Lambs o'er their mother's back waged war,
Twirling their tails the while.

The mavis with his golden song
Flooded the flowery vale,
And a hundred throats hard by took up
The same old magic tale.

A Memory

The fragrant sallow-catkins caught
The laggard honey-bee ;
The grass was springing, and all around
Daisies pied the lea.

We talked but little—'twas no time
For cold philosophies—
But gave ourselves up to delight,
As all should who'd be wise.

Those little maids, all brimming o'er
With health and youth, did play
On the greensward. The embodiment
Of all the rest seemed they.

And now demurely on a seat,
Tired out with running races,
They sat, and eyed us as we passed,
With shy yet roguish faces.

We greeted them ; the elder girl
Down-dropped her eyes so sweet,
Yet now and then flashed such a glance
My heart with wonder beat.

When thus she looked, a smile broke out,
Like sun in a deep glade,
From her dark orbs, and round her lips
Sweet curving ripples played.

The younger maiden, nestling close,
Swung round and peeped at us
Over her sister's shoulder. Still
Methinks I see them thus.

A Memory

As home we went, my heart beat high ;
I seemed to tread on air :
For long, life's blank pages were bright
With the picture of that pair.

But that was many years ago,
That glad springtime is o'er ;
Those flowers are dead, those two sweet maids
Are children now no more.

She was so simple and so pure ;
Thought in her eyes dwelt deep.
Ay, *then* ; but in this world few hopes
Come true. Oh, let me weep !

WHAT BEFEL ME ON A WINTER AFTERNOON

THE sun is sunk behind the hill,
The twilight droppeth down,
The winter woods are bare and brown,
And all the world is still.
Weary and all alone am I,
And yet my heart beats strangely high.

I cannot tell what hath my heart,
I feel as one possessed,
As one who hath been richly blest —
What is it, O my heart ?
A splendour doth my path surround,
I seem to pace enchanted ground.

Oh, there are motions in the air,
And soft winds whispering,
The thrush, grown wild at thought of Spring,
Is calling loud and clear ;
And now I see the children play
About the roads—'tis holiday.

On a Winter Afternoon

Now all the dissonant, jangling strings
Of Life that vexèd me
Have fallen into harmony,
And all my spirit sings.
Deep in your hearts the secret's writ,
Children, could ye but speak of it !

Why am I happy as a boy,
So lately gulfed in woe ?
What matter ? 'tis enough to know
That I have found strange joy.
Joy yesterday I sought in vain,
Dropped from the skies like summer rain.

Oh, strive no more to understand,
Or you will ruin all,
Oft to tell things most magical
We can but press the hand.
Let this suffice : I do rejoice
As one who hears a bridegroom's voice.

TO A MAN THREATENING SUICIDE

DON'T do it, man, take my advice :
Your instincts ought to be too nice ;
But if you can't wait till invited—
Well, don't complain if you get slighted.

Just think : suppose, when you got there,
No one should heed you ; there you'd stand
Agape, while ' men and angels stare,'
Turning your hat round in your hand,
Like awkward schoolboy ; till one cries,
Now first observing you with surprise
(He seems to be someone rather great),
' I'm afraid you will have to stand and wait ;
There is not a single seat to let.
You see, we did not expect you yet.
We thought you were occupied down below ;
When we're ready we always let folks know.
Even then they are often reluctant to go.
But you seem disinclined to work ;
Now take the reward of all who shirk.
Since you are come, you may as well stay
And watch the rest as they feast and play.
Now other matters are demanding

To a Man threatening Suicide

My prompt attention'—he turns on his heel—
'I trust you won't get tired of standing.'
Then you watch the rest at their sumptuous meal,
And, oh, what an arrant fool you feel !

So, comrade, won't you wait a bit,
And play out the game like a lad of grit?
Babes run to their mummies when things go hard,
But men play the game to the very last card.
And in case the picture is true I have sketched,
Don't you think 'twould be wiser to wait till you're
fetched ?

A DREAM

THEY had gone from me and I was there alone,
Under the white moon, wondering why they went
And I went not. The rocks of that rude shore
Stood wrapped in their black shadows, and far out
The sea gleamed silvery in the pallid light,
And filled the world with its weird undertone.
I watched them out of view, and though a cry
Trembled upon my lips, it went not forth
Upon the silence. So they passed from me.
Disconsolate I moved among the shades,
All heedless of my going. All my joy—
I knew not, but I felt I had been joyous—
Was gone from me, and with an empty soul,
Surrounded on all sides by emptiness,
I stumbled on. Now I became aware,
Now first, of a drear wind that had sprung up,
That moaned and mumbled near like a lost soul,
Now raising its low voice into a wail,
Now dropping into sobs scarce audible.
The light was paling, too ; no more the shadows
Stood out, clean cut, black as the rocks that cast them,
But all grew grey and dim, and I perceived
That clouds, unseen till now, were gathering slowly,

A Dream

Creeping up one by one out of the west,
Like evil things, about the moon. The sky,
So pure before, was now half full of them,
And she herself, now pale and harrowed, seemed
To pause, perplexed which way to turn, pressed hard
By her rude foes. All grey and white they were,
With ribs, and loose flesh hanging raggedly,
Like tattered raiment, round them. Horrid shapes
I wis, like skeletons of things long dead,
Awaked, crept from some hideous charnel-house.

Alone, and emptiness within my soul !
A dreary, moaning wind, a paling light,
A chilly breath felt in my freezing veins,
Felt in my heart ! How long I stumbled on
In aimless wandering I know not ; it seemed
Eternity. By now the moon was hid,
And the whole sky crowded with those ghastly shapes.
I was no longer 'mong the rocks ; the sea
Was faintly moaning still, but far away.
I stood upon a desolate waste, a spot
Abandoned, shunned alike by man and beast,
Where naught that lived would come save me alone.
Heedless over the rugged turf I went,
Tripping on ancient mole-hills, long deserted,
Pushing my way through stiff grey tufts of grass,
That whispered hoarsely in the wind. At last
I came upon a grim and mouldering ruin,
Naked and gaunt with eld, 'mid whose lean rafters
The winds went sobbing huskily. In I went,
Impelled by some strange power, though a great dread
Clutched at my heart. It was a haunted place,
Tenanted only by some unknown Terror,

A Dream

And ever round me whispered husky voices,
A chilly breath blew on me, unseen hands
Laid cold, dank fingers on my brow, until
I almost shrieked aloud in agony !
I inspired terror with each gasping breath,
The murky atmosphere seemed thick with it ;
But still I dragged my shuddering limbs on, on,
'Thridding my way among the skeleton posts
And crumbling walls. And now from the grey sky
The haggard moon looked down 'twixt the old rafters,
As if imploring succour. She and I
Seemed helpless and alone, waging a strife
All single-handed 'gainst relentless foes.
It seemed to me I'd passed out of the world,
Out of the universe, and wandered lone
Outside all things that were, by God and man
Unheeded evermore. The very moon
Was not the moon that shone upon the earth
Whence I had stepped. 'Twas but a phantom orb.

Then was I 'ware—though to my knowledge never
Had I trod there before—of corridors
That wound interminably underground
'Neath that grim structure, full of the same dread
Increased a thousandfold ; 'twas the abode
Of Terror bodied in a moving shape,
Unseen, unknown, stupendous, horrible !
Now stood I at the entrance of this hell,
And, shuddering, heard strange whispers all about,
Urging me in. But with a shriek I turned,
And fled away among the ruins, hurrying
Like one sore vexed with devils, to avoid
What still pursued. When the wild panic died
At last, in a cold sweat I found myself

A Dream

Within a banquet-hall, where there was spread
What seemed a wedding-feast. There goblets stood,
And silver flagons all in bright array,
With dishes interspersed, loaded with fruits
That mouldered not. Where were the groom and bride?
Where were the guests? Why came they not? I strove
To shout aloud, but could not; with dry lips
And quivering tongue estrangèd, mute I stood,
Stricken with awe. All was as still as death;
There was no light save for the moon's wan ray.
The silence and the horror of the place
Pressed on my heart; I dared not move nor cry.

* * * * *

Was it a little solitary bird
That piped among the ruins? . . . Passing strange!
Who breathed my name in tones so musical?
Hark! far and faint, wafted along the breeze!
It comes again! What music thrills my ear?
What voice that singeth blithe? What fragrance sweet
Penetrates here? 'Tis she herself—'tis she!
And the tears rushed to my eyes in ecstasy!

* * * * *

'Twas day; the sunlight pulsing o'er the sea
Smote us, as on we journeyed hand in hand,
With hearts like brimming cups, on, on for ever!
How mad the birds were! How the crystal rills
Danced to the shore! How sweet the morning air!
Bright flowers were opening in the dewy grass,
And gentle creatures sported round our steps.
We trod the zephyrs, speeding on our way,
Exultant, in a joyous company.
A sunlit city over the sparkling deep
Beaconed us thither: we were journeying home.

MAY IN THE MEADOW

OH, who on this joyous May morn could be dull?
Of merriment all the young world is full :
The swallows dart through the sunny air,
Now skimming past me, but no sooner here
Than they're up in the blue skies, miles away,
Pursuing each other in headlong play.
The starlings, like buttons on twisted strings,
All quivering now, now with motionless wings,
Turn and wheel, or charge forward unanimously :
Their squadrons are carefully drilled, I see.
There is sun in the valley, but mists on the hill,
Freshening the breezes which wander at will,
Now in the treetops sitting aloft,
Hidden in green, and by melodies soft
Lulled to rest ; but now they are up again,
Scouring the meadows in the plain,
Roving hither and thither among the grasses,
Which gracefully bend as each lightly passes,
So airily, like some fairy princess,
That each separate footstep seems a caress,
And the buttercups, daisies, and black plantain-heads,
Bow in a transport of love where she treads.

And here, content, in the long grass I lie,
Forgotten by none ; as they wander by,

May in the Meadow

The breezes feed me with lavish hand
From the stores they distribute all over the land
Impartially—'tis a pot-pourri, made
Of sweets stolen from coppice and flowery glade.
For me wave the grasses, for me the birds sing,
For me that great bumble-bee, setting a-swing
Yon sweet clover-tuft, luxuriously drones,
And all Nature murmurs in richest tones
To make me happy. 'Tis all for me,
For to-day I'm her guest, and you will agree
Nature never gives grudgingly.
And if I, in her midst, were out of tune,
Not alive to the joy of this joyous noon,
Unwarmed by the sun that laughs out from the sky,
'Twould mar all her pleasures, and this is why
She displays her best charms to delight my eye.
For I know—though perhaps you will think me bold—
While there still was someone left out in the cold
She could not rejoice. She won me, too—
To resist such wiles, I defy you !

SONNETS

I

SUNDAY EVENING (6.30 P.M.)

THE jangle of the sweet church bells hath ceased
 (A sound I love ; 'twas heard in infancy),
The streams of sober folk no more pass by
My garden gate, whereat I stand and feast
On beauty—eye, and ear, and soul. On beast
 And man alike a wondrous harmony
Hath, like a garment, fallen. In the wide sky
The moon climbs upward from the purpling east,
And in the west, over the darkling hill,
 A dusky veil, inwoven cunningly
With vermeil threads, is drawn. Now all is still,
 Save for the throstle's call, and a low sound
Of running water. On the dark hill-crest I've found
One gateway, opening on Infinity.

February, 1904.

II

CHINESE LABOUR IN THE TRANSVAAL

WHAT, home of the free, my England ! fallen so low ?
Was it for this your heroes fought and died,
O'erthrew the tyrant and the liberticide,
Knocking away, through centuries, blow on blow,
The senseless barriers to which all must bow,
Which outlet to the poor man's gifts denied,
The many enslaved and the few deified ?

Sonnets

Would one such patriot moved among us now—
One strong, great man—not for his own ends strong,
But to uphold the right and crush the wrong,
And therefore great ; one who loved liberty,
Who ne'er misnamed ill-deeds necessity,
Who, through a thousand perils, calmly trod
The one straight course, and left the rest to God.

March, 1904.

III

TO A GIRL, SEEN IN CHURCH

OH, thou most beautiful ! I ne'er have seen
A creature so compact of every grace.
My eyes seem riveted upon thy face,
As, stepping 'midst thy fellows like our queen,
Stately and proud, and splendidly serene,
The benediction said, thou leav'st this place
With us, but seeming of some loftier race,
For by thy side we look most dull and mean.
Ah ! in my younger days I might perchance
Have dreamed one day of being called thy friend.
Long since I've learnt such hopes are vain ; yet lend—
Thou scarcely canst refuse it—one bright glance
To deck my verse. 'Tis mine ; already, see !
I write more gracefully for this glimpse of thee.

Sonnets

IV

WRITTEN ON A STILE AT TORRINGTON (*May*, 1904)

THE air is alive with the lark's rhapsodies ;
From every copse the thrush's note peals out ;
Far, in some faery land, the cuckoo's shout
I hear enchanted ; from a hundred trees,
Borne to me on the heavy-scented breeze,
Grateful as water to a thirsty throat,
All crystal-clear, the merle's wild warblings float,
His pauses filled by lesser melodies.
And yet how peaceful is this rural scene,
How restful to the jaded traveller !
The sounds of town life borne on the still air
Break not the quiet of these woodlands green.
The grasses 'neath the hazels scarcely stir ;
The clouds are low—'twill rain ere night, I ween.

V

IN THE SAME SPOT (*May*, 1904)

OH, all is quietness and beauty here.
Ingrate ! I'm not content—ah no, not quite.
These sheep that graze, with young lambs frisking near,
And red cows, 'mid the golden gorse, are dear ;
So are the birds, that pour out their delight
From every leafy spray, and thrill mine ear ;
So are the flowers that make yon hedge so bright—
White milkmaids, campions pink, and the rare blue,

Sonnets

Sweet, saucy speedwell ; the long grasses, too,
Which flutter in each straying zephyr's sighs,
Till the heart aches, beholding things so fair.
Yet not content am I. Love, I want you !
To find the lovely mirrored in your eyes,
And read its deep interpretation there.

VI

OH, I have gazed on Beauty's radiancy,
Held with her spirit high communion
On breathless summer eves, when the red sun
Flings a charmed pathway o'er the crystal sea,
Kissing the flowers to sleep upon the lea ;
I've watched the bright stars steal out one by one
On hot, still, magic nights, when all alone
Wandering in glooms and dusky mystery ;
I've left gay throngs to list to the tide's flow,
When pale light lingers in the western skies ;
Peered into haunted pools and girls' deep eyes :
At such times have I felt as one who stands
On woodland path that winds to faery lands,
And fain would follow it, but may not go.

Sonnets

VII

'Tis midnight, and the moon is at the full :
Most folk are in their beds, but I sit here
After the bustling day, and on the clear,
Calm night gaze out, taking a long, deep pull
At Nox's flask, filled with a draught so cool,
Instantly every pulse is stilled. Mine ear
Hears but one sound—the rail, now far, now near,
In the lush meadow-grass makes sorrowful
And lovelorn calls in a harsh voice to his wife.
The moon dreams down on all. How black the trees
Stand in their shadows ! I'm like a caged bird,
I know not why ; but by this wandering breeze
Which rustles round the world my hair is stirred ;
I catch vague rumours of a vaster life.

VIII

OH, well content am I, on a hot June day,
When Love draws near, and all the world is fair,
To fling myself, without a thought or care,
Down on a haycock, there to drowse away
The lagging hours ; to feel the sun's hot ray
Burn on my cheek ; half in a doze to hear
A murmurous stream of noises on the air,
The distant shouts of men who rake the hay,

Sonnets

The drone of happy insects on the wing,
Hushing the dreamy world ; one lonely bird
In the hedge hard by is softly carolling ;
At the farm a sleepy cock is faintly heard ;
And in my breast, all warring thoughts subdued,
A deep and holy Sabbath calm doth brood.

IX

HERE all is peace and solemn quietness ;
My heart is tuned to a calm delight,
As, leaning o'er the gate this summer night,
After the burning noonday's stir and stress,
I feel about my hair the soft caress
Of the vagrant breezes, wandering from the height
Where shattered stars pave the broad road so white,
That traverses the heaven's wide wilderness.
The moon is up ; her silver arrows gleam
On thousand gossamers wov'n about the grass ;
Lights twinkle in the valley ; all did seem
How still ! But, hark ! I hear now far ahead
Faint-echoing hoofs : some weary man doth pass
Homeward to supper, wife and babes, and bed.

Sonnets

X

CAERPHILLY CASTLE, NEAR CARDIFF

AFTER the heated crowds, the hoot of trains,
And modern traffic's multitudinous din,
'Tis almost startling now to stand within
These mouldering walls, where old, old Silence reigns,
Where Thought broods deep, and everything remains
Ever the same, though the rest of the world must
spin .
Its giddy round. O city man! step in,
Leave fussy cares awhile, break Custom's chains.
Where long ago were heard the tramp of feet
And clash of steel, or shout of revelry,
Now nothing breaks the silence save the bleat
Of sheep and goats, while Nant-y-Gledyr's stream
Glides on beneath his willows in a dream :
Here sit, and ponder Life's solemnity.

XI

TO BEETHOVEN

OH, Poet, Seer, thou whose splendrous dreams
Lay far beyond the scope of mortal tongue,
Where art thou now ? Dost sit the stars among,
Hearing their harmonies in mighty streams
Pour out the mystery of Nature's schemes,
The golden tale of Life ? At last hast wrung
That old deep secret out, so often sung
Of poet vexed by fragmentary gleams ?

Sonnets

Sure thou didst know ! The perfect harmony
Of high romance doth with thy music swell,
And flood the soul ! Oh, might I press thy hand,
And say I love and dimly understand
What thou wouldst say ! I, too, have felt the spell,
The solemn rapture, the wild ecstasy !

XII

TO WORDSWORTH

WHEN I too long have listened to the voice
Of learned men dispute with subtlety,
And test and analyse all things that be,
Till naught seems left, as a fond babe destroys
And ne'er can mend again his marvellous toys,
Then, sick to the heart, at last I turn to thee,
My Friend ! and let thy clear springs whisper me
The secret I had lost—how to rejoice.
Sure I was wiser in my happy youth,
When I did hear, unquestioning, the tales
The thrush all day would tell out to the dales—
With bounding heart did hear, and feel their truth.
Instruct me still, thou Teacher of the wise ;
I'll heed no more the dull world's dreary lies.

Sonnets

XIII

ON THE 'TSAR'S ADDRESS TO THE WORKMEN,
FEBRUARY 1, 1905

WHAT! are the rebels pardoned? Wonderful!
Was ever known such kingly clemency?
These men had questioned high Authority,
Had dared admit a doubt within their soul
That Virtue needs must dwell with them who rule,
That Strong means Good, and Power must ever be
Prov'n in the right—with logic, possibly—
If not, with lead! (ofttimes a readier tool).
Rash fools! I wonder they could pardon you!
What, wist ye not that, were it clearly shown
That Satan had attempted Heaven's high throne,
And won it, we would wait on his least nod,
And brand him rebel who dared still hold true
To a fallen cause and to a conquered God?

XIV

HERESY

OH, you most wise, who thus so glibly prate
Of heretics, with solemn shake of head,
Hinting 'twere better all such folk were dead—
What *is* a heretic, that on his pate
Such curses should descend? Your zeal abate,
Lest you be found of those who (oft 'tis said)
Rush rudely in, where angels fear to tread.

Sonnets

Oh, are you fool, or are you more than great ?
Is it *so* simple that if others trust
To reach the Light by ways not yours, they must
 Be guilty of gross sin, be worse than blind ?
O Oracle ! has special grace revealed
To you the road, from all the rest concealed ?
 Lead on, then ! Oh, how close we'll press behind !

XV

THE ORCHESTRA

‘ Man, ch, not men !’

SHELLEY.

How dull my music seemed, how void of sense !
 The chords I scraped out did not sound to me
 Uplifting, though I knew the work to be
A mighty master's, and with diligence
On that account, but not the least pretence
 At zeal, I played, and found it drudgery.
 But, as I played on, half unconsciously,
My ears were opened, and, like rare incense
From hundred altars fuming up, to blend
 In the sunny air, I heard our strains arise
 All over the wide hall, mingling in deep,
 Sweet harmony, and o'er my soul did sweep
 Strange passion, for with shock of glad surprise
The master's purpose I did apprehend.

Sonnets

XVI

YOU AND ME

THE sea is like a wide waste, dull and dead,
With one black sail : about the port of Day
Flames with gigantic shadows leap and play.
The flagging rooks are toiling home to bed.
The world, so loud all day, sits with bowed head,
Fallen strangely silent ; cares are put away ;
All rapt she seems, as, after long delay,
Once more with her dear lord she communèd.
Tired comrade, homeward trudging for the night
From dreary toil—behold yon shadowy skies,
And know you're magic in a magic land.
Ah ! when the Enchanter takes us by the hand
And shows us You and Me, 'twill be delight
Of power to wring the tears from dullest eyes !

THE END

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